

AWIS

ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN IN SCIENCE



ADVOCACY HANDBOOK

AWIS.ORG





AWIS members stand in front of the US Capitol during our annual AWIS Capitol Hill Days in 2018

Make your voice heard through advocacy! Advocacy is the way you can push for political and policy change, and it can happen at any level of government including city, local, state, and federal. Often advocating for a policy change is more successful by starting on the local or state level, or even within your university or company. However, you should not be afraid to set up meetings, send emails, make calls and advocate for issues you care about on the federal level with your senators and representatives.

The Association for Women in Science is here to support you every step of the way! In addition to this handbook, check out our previous advocacy webinars and research on our website www.awis.org.

More about AWIS

The Association for Women in Science (AWIS), founded in 1971, is the leading organization that advocates on behalf of women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) to achieve business growth, social change, and innovation. We are dedicated to driving excellence in STEM by achieving equity and full participation of women in all disciplines and across all employment sectors.

Since its founding, AWIS has advocated for policy changes that support broadening women's participation in STEM, create more equitable workplaces, support innovation and entrepreneurship, and promote women's leadership. AWIS was involved in getting Lily Ledbetter Paycheck Fairness Act passed through Congress. This law which protects against pay discrimination became the first piece of legislation signed into law by President Obama after he took office. AWIS has worked with NASA and other federal agencies to implement Title IX compliance reviews, been an active advocate for women in the workplace in a variety of STEM coalitions, and led a variety of other advocacy initiatives. Most recently, AWIS advocated for federal science research funding through AWIS Capitol Hill Days that resulted in a historic increase in science related R&D appropriations.

AWIS policy

AWIS is a nonprofit, nonpartisan 501c3 organization. AWIS is organized and operated exclusively for charitable and educational purposes, specifically:

- To promote equal opportunity for women to enter scientific professions and achieve their career goals
- To raise the status of women in science, and women generally
- To initiate, encourage and engage in research related to women in the scientific fields and other works of educational and scientific nature
- To exchange information with other groups supportive of our goals, and coordinate activities directed to their fulfillment



The use of the AWIS name and acronym may only be used in communicating our mission and vision. Please do not use the AWIS name or acronym with political messages or other communications that are not directly tied to the official views of AWIS.

Being an advocate

Know what you want to advocate for

Here is a list of important policy initiatives that aim to support women in STEM, enable them to stay in the workplace and encourage more women to enter STEM fields. This list is not comprehensive; please feel free to share with us the issues that matter most to you, such as:

- Equal pay
- Equal promotion of women into leadership positions
- Recognition of women's scientific achievements by institutions/professional societies
- Affordable childcare
- Paid family leave
- Anti-harassment policies
- Funding for research by federal and state agencies (NIH, NSF, DOD)
- Support for women in STEM education
- Affordable tuition
- Access to healthcare for women and families

"AWIS provides access to comprehensive information and a platform for having one's voice heard."

*—Forough Ghahramani,
AWIS member from New Jersey*

“Diversity in STEM will help us move closer to solving global issues through innovative ideas.”

- Penny Melquist, AWIS member from Oregon

Find the legislation you care about

Check <https://www.congress.gov/> to learn about legislation introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate and find the latest developments, co-sponsors and committee assignments for specific legislation. Search <https://www.congress.gov/state-legislature-websites> to find the legislative website for your state legislature.

Know your representatives

The League of Women Voters have a great tool to find your representatives at every level of government: <https://www.lwv.org> Find your congressional representatives at <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members>

No matter where you live, the policymakers with the most direct impact on issues that matter to you are on the city/county government level—and fortunately they are the easiest to contact! One step up from local governments is your state legislatures where policymakers should also be easy to contact and visit. In all states but Nebraska and the District of Columbia (D.C.), the state legislature is divided up into a lower and upper house just like Congress is divided into the House of Representatives and the Senate. Your state also has an Executive branch, which includes the Governor’s Office and all state agencies (Department of Health, Department of Transportation etc.) which will have wide-ranging power over the budget, grant programs, and implementation of state laws. On the federal level, you will have one representative in the House of Representatives and two senators who can meet with you at their D.C. offices or the local district offices in your home district.

All of your elected representatives want to hear from you and are always willing to meet with or otherwise communicate with constituents to be able to better serve you.

Do your homework and know your audience

Look up your representatives and senators in Congress on <https://www.govtrack.us/> to learn about their positions on the issues of interest to you. You can also find your representatives on social media to see what they have accomplished and posted about recently. Create a connection between the issues that are at the forefront of their agenda and those you care about. Know what committees your elected official serves on and what his or her branch of government is able to achieve.

Keep in mind that every elected official has a different ability to act on an issue. A State Senator cannot influence a piece of legislation that is in front of the U.S. House of Representatives. It is not possible for a member of the Executive branch to vote for a bill, nor can a member of the Legislative branch veto a bill. If a bill is assigned to committee or sub-committee, then only the officials serving on the committee or subcommittee can vote on the legislation: tailor your ask to reflect the powers that official has.

“I believe that one and one make eleven. Progress increases logarithmically when individuals work together.”

- Amy Kullas, AWIS member from Maryland

Advocacy options

There are many ways for you or your local chapter to advocate for women in STEM and all other issues you care about. We urge you to continue to stay engaged in advocacy throughout the year using a variety of advocacy options.

- Meet with an elected official. Contact your councilperson, city official, state legislator, representative, and/or senator. It is also possible to meet with, contact, and give feedback to state agencies, governors, and even federal executive agencies
- Send an email or letter to your elected official
- Call your elected official's office
- Use the media to advocate and raise awareness for issues you care about by writing a letter to an editor, writing an op-ed, using targeted social media posts, or starting a petition
- Meet with your representatives in person again, and follow-up
- Send thank you notes to elected officials who introduce or pass legislation that supports women in STEM
- Show up to meetings, hearings, and town halls to speak up on issues you care about
- Volunteer with an organization that works on the issue from the ground up. For example, if you believe that affordable childcare is a really important issue for the promotion of women in STEM fields, you could volunteer or fundraise for programs around you which provide that service





Above from left to right: AWIS members stand with Senator Mark Warner of Virginia during AWIS Capitol Hill Days 2018. Congressman Randy Hultgreen of Illinois standing with members of AWIS after a successful meeting. Members of AWIS New Jersey stand with their Representative, Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman. Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton of the District of Columbia with members of AWIS DC

Meeting with your elected official in person

Be sure to reach out to officials that represent you, as they will be more likely to answer than those who do not represent your area, and you will be more likely to be able to connect it to issues the representative cares about.

In order to schedule a meeting, you should find the website of the official you hope to visit. Normally, you will either find contact information for their scheduler or chief of staff, or you will find a section of their website called “Request a Meeting”. If there is a web-form to request a meeting, fill it out and the staff of the official you are hoping to contact will get back to you shortly.

If the email of a contact in the office of the elected official you want to meet with is not easily accessible on their website, which is often the case for the Senate, then you can call and ask for the email for the scheduler. This happens all the time so don’t be nervous, and they should give it to you without any fuss.

You can also find the names of congressional staffers at <http://congressional-staff.insidegov.com/> traditionally emails are set up First_Last@SenatorsLastName.senate.gov, you want to find out the name of the scheduler and put it in the correct format.

Most state legislators, senators, and congressmen have district offices that should be near your home address. You can ask to meet the elected official or a member of staff in their district office so there is less travel involved. On the local and state level, your officials may be willing to meet you at a local coffee shop, library or restaurant to discuss an issue.

Expect to spend at most 10 to 15 minutes with the elected official. It is not uncommon for elected officials to have legislative assistants hold the meeting instead. While the elected official may only have a very limited amount of time during the meetings, their aide or assistant is in position to dedicate more time to hear your position and address your questions and concerns, plus their aide is usually the one who helps the official make informed decisions, so it’s often just as important to educate them as it is the member.

Prepare a short summary of the bills or issues you are advocating for and share it during the meeting with staff and the elected official. Be sure to include the bill number, title, and summary, what position you are advocating for and why; include key statistics and important reasons that explain why they should support this position. Do not show up with a large packet or book and expect them to read it. Your summary and explainer should be no longer than one page front and back.

Email meeting request

Here is a brief template that you can use to request a meeting with an elected official at any level of government. The more specific you are about what you wish to discuss, the more likely the office will want to set up a meeting, so please add more information to the email and include bill numbers or policy details, if applicable. If there is a group of people going to the meeting or if there are any needs for disability accommodations, say so in the email so the office of the representative knows what to expect. And always put your address in the email so the office knows you are a constituent.

Re: [Meeting Request] Meeting to discuss women in STEM

Good morning,

My name is [your name] and I am a constituent of [your representative's name]. I would like to set up a meeting at [specify which office by city] on [date and time range].

During the meeting, I hope to discuss the importance of women in STEM and the need to fund scientific endeavors. American national security and economic progress is dependent on scientific innovation which requires full utilization of the entire STEM talent pool and adequate funding for scientific institutions and studies.

I look forward to meeting with [your representative's name] and how this issue is important to our area and some of the steps [your representative's name] can take to ensure women are able to enter and remain in STEM fields.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns and I would be happy to provide more information.

I look forward to hearing back from you!

Thank you,

[Your name, title/position and home address]

Tips for holding an effective meeting

1. The most effective advocates are redundant; have a single message and policy recommendation to address the issue you are advocating for and repeat it during the meeting.
2. Work within your institution; whether it is the university, company or another affiliate, advocate as a group. The more people present at the meeting, the more signatures on the petition, the more amplified your message will be. Show that your views and positions are shared by many people and they will have a greater impact.
3. Use data but also have a personal narrative; connect the reason you came and your "ask" to yourself, your experiences and your local community.
4. Know what to expect; most meetings will be 15 minutes long and often with a legislative aide rather than the elected official (but that is perfectly okay). Most often you will meet with the legislative aid in the office of the elected official which has a desk and couches or in a meeting room nearby but it could also be a meeting in a hallway or a crowded cubicle.

Starting the meeting

1. Introduce yourselves to the staff, as well as the elected representative if they are in attendance.
2. Make a short statement about your position, your “ask,” your personal story and why you came to meet with them. Be clear what you are asking the person you are meeting with to do.
3. Stick to the issues you asked to discuss. Don’t get sidetracked by the elected representative or any staff who are also in attendance. When the conversation inevitably veers off topic, bring it back to the reason you came and don’t be afraid to press a staffer or elected official for a definitive answer or position statement in support or opposition to your ask.
4. Ask if the elected official will pose for photo with your group and if all members have given permission to be photographed. Images and quotes from the day should be shared on social media and be sure to tag the elected officials social media accounts as a way to say thank you.
5. Thank the elected representative or their staff for meeting with you and for supporting women in STEM.



AWIS members in an advocacy related training



AWIS members with staff of Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia

Emailing or sending physical mail to your elected official

Sending an email or physical letter is just one more way to voice your position to your elected officials. A physical letter is more likely to be read than an email. Keep in mind that snail mail takes time to arrive and be sorted so this is an effective, but much slower process than a phone call or social media campaign. Most offices will not respond or only respond with a form email after a couple weeks, but someone did actually read it.

You can typically find an email or feedback web-form and the mailing address on the elected official's website. Sending an email to an actual staffers email is far better than using the website form. If you have trouble finding the best email or physical address, call the office and ask.



Email and letter tips

1. Email or send mail to your own elected officials and put the address where you are registered to vote on the letter or in the email, so they know you are a genuine constituent.
2. Establish your credibility. Have a clear story and narrative in your email or letter and connect it to your ask of the elected official.
3. Make sure your letter is legible and try to make it stand out by including pictures or bright colors to make sure it gets attention and leaves an impact.
4. Do not include any attachments in your email as the staffer might not be able to open them or the email will be caught in a spam filter.
5. Keep it brief, polite and free of grammar errors.

Calling your Representative

Calling your representative is a great way to voice your opinion with a minimal time commitment and no travel required.

Every elected official will have a public telephone number that constituents can call to leave feedback, this could either be a place where you leave a voicemail or talk with a staff member. Both methods of leaving feedback can be effective and communicate to your elected official that their constituency really cares about an issue. In the case you talk with a staffer they will probably take notes, but not respond to your inquiry.

Tips for making calls

1. Only call your own elected officials and clearly state the address at which you are registered to vote so they know you are a constituent. Consider calling the local or district office of your state and federal representatives, as they receive less communication generally, meaning you are more likely to talk to a person.
2. Know what your “ask” or feedback is before you call. Clearly tell the staffer what you want the elected official to do, why it is important and why you feel so motivated to call. Stay polite with the staffer on the phone but be firm in your interaction as it will be short. Try and write out what you want to say before you call.

Begin your call with:

Hello my name is [your name] and I am a constituent of [you elected official’s name]. I live in [your town/city name]

I am calling to urge [you elected official’s name] to support/oppose [issue/legislation title].

3. Keep your call short. Only call about one issue at a time and do not stay on the call for more than five minutes. You can ask questions if you want but don’t expect to stay on the phone with a staffer until they give you a satisfactory response. But you can ask for the staffer to call back or follow up with a response and give them your email or phone number.
4. Call more than once. Constituents can call as often they want. If there is a very pressing issue that your call could make a difference on, do not feel afraid to call back in the next day or the next week to make sure you get a response or are able to talk with a staffer in person to communicate your “ask.”

“We were able to educate the congressional offices that AWIS is there as a resource for them, which is really impactful.”

- Kelsey Sugrue, AWIS member from DC

Social media

Social media is a very public way to show your support or opposition to the policies or actions of your representatives. You can use Facebook, Twitter or any other form of social media to shape press coverage around an official and make an issue rise to their attention.

You can find your elected officials on social media fairly easily by just searching their name on the platform, but not every elected official has social media pages. Social media is a great way to circulate a public letter to the official or a petition.



Tips for effective outreach

1. Make sure that you tag their official page, not the political. In most cases the official page will have more followers and attention given to it rather than the personal or campaign pages.
2. Include a picture as this increases the likelihood that others will read the text that goes along with it.
3. Make it clear you are a constituent of the elected official and make the post personal. However be aware of any personal information on the post as it will be visible to the public.
4. Get others involved. A social media campaign is much more effective than a single post, and the more engagement a post gets the more attention the elected official will give to it. Consider creating a hashtag or getting many people to make similar posts to amplify your message.

Do not be discouraged if change comes slowly

Change cannot happen in a day, and bringing up the issues that matter to women in STEM will create traction and raise awareness. Often legislation takes years to become law, which makes your advocacy and your efforts that much more important; you are working to get that bill to the threshold needed to pass.

"I am now convinced that together we can make a difference."

- Daniela Nikolova, AWIS member from Florida

About AWIS

The Association for Women in Science (AWIS) is a global network with chapters and affiliates connecting professionals in STEM with members, allies and supporters worldwide. Founded in 1971, AWIS has been the leading advocate for women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) to achieve business growth, social change, and innovation. We are dedicated to driving excellence in STEM by achieving equity and full participation of women in all disciplines and across all employment sectors.

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Questions?

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